

PRIMARY SOURCE **Exploration of Cape Verde**
by Alvise da Cadamosto

In 1455, the Venetian explorer Alvise da Cadamosto, traveling in the service of Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator, sailed south along the coast of West Africa as far as the Gambia River. In the following excerpt from his travelogue, he describes Cape Verde and nearby islands. As you read his description, think about different features that he observed during the course of his explorations.

This Capo Verde is so called because the first to discover it (who were Portuguese) about a year before I was in these parts found it all green with great trees [mangrove swamps], which remained in leaf throughout the year. For this reason they gave it the name of Capo Verde: just as Capo Bianco, of which we have already spoken, was found entirely sandy and white and was therefore called "Capo Bianco." This Capo Verde is very beautiful and lofty: on the point there are two hillocks. It runs far into the sea, and on the cape and in its vicinity there are many dwellings of negro peasants, huts of straw, close to the sea, and visible to those who pass. These negroes belong to the said Kingdom of Senega.

Off [the cape] we found three small islands, not very far from the land, uninhabited and covered with tall green trees. Being in need of water, we anchored off one of them [Gorée], which appeared the largest and most fruitful, to ascertain if any springs were to be found there. On landing we found no water, except in one spot where there was a little water, but which was of no use to us. We found many nests on the island, and eggs of various birds [un]known to us. While we remained here we all fished with lines and large hooks and caught a great number of fish: among them shell fish and very large mature dories, weighing from twelve to fifteen pounds each. This was in the month of June.

Thence, the following day, we continued to sail on our voyage, always within sight of land. Beyond Capo Verde there is a gulf inland. All the coast is low, covered with very fine, tall, green trees, which never shed their leaves throughout the year [that is they never wither, as do ours], for new leaves appear before the old fall. These trees come right down to within a bowshot of the beach, so that it appears as though they flourished in the sea—a very beautiful

sight. In my opinion, who have sailed to many places in the Levant and in the west, I have never seen a more beautiful coast than this appeared to me—watered by many rivers. . . .

Running with the wind along this coast, still voyaging southwards, we discovered the mouth of a river, perhaps a bowshot wide, and of no great depth. To this river we gave the name of Rio di Barbazini [the Joal], and thus it is named on the "carta da navigar" of this country made by me. It is distant sixty miles from the Capo Verde. We always navigated this coast and beyond by day, anchoring each evening at a deserted spot in ten or twelve passa [two passa equal roughly one fathom] of water, and four or five miles from the shore. At dawn we made sail, always stationing one man aloft and two men in the bows of the caravel to watch for breakers which would disclose the presence of shoals.

Sailing thus we reached the mouth of another large river, which appeared to be no smaller than the Rio de Senega. When we saw this fine river [the estuary of the Solum and Jumbas rivers], and the beautiful country, we cast anchor. . . .

from Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., ed., *The Horizon History of Africa* (American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), 330.

Activity Options

1. **Recognizing Facts and Details** Create a chart to illustrate what Cadamosto found when he explored Cape Verde and nearby islands. Use the following headings—*Geography, Plants, Animals, Peoples*.
2. **Analyzing Information** Use a map of Africa to find Cape Verde on the western coast. Then determine the distance that Cadamosto and his crew sailed from Portugal to Cape Verde.